

**Role of Nehru in Advancement in Education in India after Independence**

Dr. Sanchita Ray<sup>1</sup>

“The younger generation is your future hope .On them depends the progress of our country. The way their faculties are developed and minds moulded will make or mar India’s destiny. Hence the need to give top priority to the educational needs of the growing generation.....”

Jawaharlal Nehru

**Abstract**

Jawaharlal Nehru was a passionate advocate of education to all. He was highly impressed by the scientific progress of the west and the value of English education. He supported the educational means as prevalent in the west and planned to established western type of education in India. This makes him the architect of modern educational system in India. He considered education as the most important means to social change. It is only through right education a better order of Society could be built up believed Nehru. Nehru stressed two basic qualities which education should aim at building strength of character would imply the development of all those traits which makes people into honest and courageous beings with a sense of integrity and right outlook would mean a developing mind which is receptive and tolerant and capable of grasping things in their entirety. Nehru’s pragmatic and progressive thinking could be assessed by

---

<sup>1</sup> Post Doctoral Research Scholar, IGNOU, New Delhi, India

the thought that he wanted education for both males as well as females equally. He emphasized that the advancement of a nation dependent on its women being educated and trained to raise the young generation on the right social values. Education did not means just the cultivation of social grace but an overall training to create a balance personality capable of making a positive contribution to society.

**Keywords** – Nehru, Education, Science and Technology, Women Education, Higher education

Education has been of central significance to the development of mankind. The objective of education is the beginning, not only of individual knowledge information and awareness, but also of a holistic strategy for development and change. India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru rightly remarked "some people seem to think that education is not as important as putting up a factory. I May sacrifice any number of factories, but I will not sacrifice human beings and their education because it is the human beings who set up factories and produce the things we want." Education helps an individual to develop his potential to the full, to increase his productivity and to become a useful and productive member of the society. Education is holistic in concept and is multi dimensional".<sup>2</sup>

Jawaharlal Nehru believed education as the most important instrument of social change. Many political thinkers and educational philosophers prophesized that it is not possible to

---

<sup>2</sup> Kirpal Prem(1990) *Foundations of Education for Free India: Toward a New Quality of Life*, New Delhi ,Allied Publisher,p156.

establish a democratic society without an adequate and suitable system of education. He too believed that education is an essential instrument for establishing a sounder base for democracy. He alleged that without mass education aimed at cultivating democratic values, political democracy would not succeed. Political democracy requires a politically conscious electorate for its successful functioning. Right type of education forms backbone of a successful democracy. Nehru remarked that 'only through right education can a better order of society be built up'<sup>3</sup>. Nehru thinks that the problems of a country cannot be solved merely through economic and political reform, since they require improved human relations, and social development is inconceivable without mental development and this mental development is possible only through education. He, thus, stated that the function of education is , thus, to produce human being of quality ..... but still we have always to remember that it is right education and good health that will give the foundation for economic as well as cultural and spiritual progress<sup>4</sup>.

The architect of modern India, Nehru, viewed education as an imperative mechanism to fight ignorance, degeneration, denigration, superstition and dogmatism that was posing as a big obstrucle in the path of India's progress. For this man of dynamic vision, education is vital for the individual development as well as for national development and progress. Nehru was of the opinion that the foremost task of education should be to develop the latent faculties of an individual, cultivate his mind and make him complete and integrated human being.<sup>5</sup> Education is the important requisite to open up the individual.<sup>6</sup> Nehru holds similar view as that of Tagore on

3

Trends In Contemporary Indian Philosophy Of Education A Critical Evaluation By G.R. Sharma's Nehru, Jawharlal, Soviet Russia P.85

<sup>4</sup> Ahuja R.L. (1965). *Nehru: His Philosophy of Life and Education*. Delhi: V. V. Prakashan Publisher. p.78

<sup>5</sup> Das, Radha Mohan. (1997). *Nehru on Democracy and Mass Education in India* in Jagdish P Sharma, Saroj K. Patnaik, Debdatta Mohanty's (ed.) "Nehru and the People's Movement". Delhi: Manak Publications Pvt. Ltd. P.292

<sup>6</sup> Nehru- Speeches, Vol IV.p.183

education, both were critical of British educational pattern because of the authoritarianism atmosphere prevailing in educational institutions which prevented the growth the mind and spread of ideas. Both of them were of the opinion that education did not mean reading and writing only but a certain measure of culture which consisted of a broad mental outlook.<sup>7</sup> Nehru emphasized on the social aspect of education “all education must have a definite social outlook and must train our youth for the kind of society we wish to have.”<sup>8</sup> Nehru was much impressed by the Soviet system of education when he visited Russia in 1927. He said, “I have the greatest admiration for many of the achievements of Soviet Union. Among these the great achievement is the value attached to the child and common man. Their systems of education and health are probably the best in the world.....”<sup>9</sup> Nehru liked the Russian, approach and aims of education and its social concerns. He says, “The object aimed at is to produce a desire to serve the community as a whole and to apply the Knowledge gained not only for personal but for public welfare”<sup>10</sup>

### Types of Education

Nehru conceived of a goal oriented educational system in various stages. The stages of pre basic training begin when a child is one or two years old. This is where the role of family especially mother becomes important in educational planning. Nehru regards this education of the highest importance because it lays the foundation of character of a child which affects the course of his future education.<sup>11</sup> The second stage he calls the stage of basic education for every

---

<sup>7</sup> Das, Radha Mohan. op.cit. pp.292-93

<sup>8</sup> Nehru's Address at All India Educational Conference at Baradari, on 27 December 1939

<sup>9</sup> Ghose, Sankar. (1993). *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Biography*. Delhi: Allied Publisher Ltd. P.243

<sup>10</sup> Nehru, Jawaharlal. *Soviets Russia* 94

<sup>11</sup> Agrawal, S.P, and Agrawal J.C. (ed.). (1989). *Nehru on Social Issues*, New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company.

boy and girl in the age group of seven and fourteen. Nehru proposed a course of basic training which would aim at shaping their character and building a physically fit body. This would involve several steps like awareness about culture past, developing strong character, capacity to work with hand and to co-ordinate manual labor with mental and intellectual ability.<sup>12</sup> For Nehru “basic education stresses both the things physical or cultural fitness and ability to do things with hands. You can take it from me that if your hands can do things your mind will work more satisfactorily”<sup>13</sup>.

For Nehru education was meant for everybody for people of every class. His plan of basic education emphasized person’s willingness to do manual work. It was a programme to produce people who would have minimum basic training and could take up any vocation or profession later in life. Nehru remarked “the whole concept of basic education is ,as I understand it that for a period of seven years everybody in India, boy and girl, between the ages of, say, seven and fourteen years, must go through this course of basic training, which must provide an adequate background for following a profession or trade.”<sup>14</sup> Nehru regarded this education to be essential for everyone so he advocated imparting of such education free of cost and compulsory for every child.<sup>15</sup>

In the final stage comes higher education and technical education. In this stage people would go in for attaining higher degrees in humanities or sciences or take to engineering or

---

<sup>12</sup>Raina, J.L. (1993). *Nehru on Education*. in NB Dasgupta, J.L. Raina, H.M Jauhari, B.M. Jauhari’s (ed.). “India: Proceedings of the National Seminar on Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Planning Commission and Planned Development in India”. New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company. p.227

<sup>13</sup>Ahuja R.L. op.cit.p.95

<sup>14</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru’s Speech Proposing the Resolution on Education at the Avadi Session of Congress, January, 1955

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

medicine. In this context, Nehru outlined the role and function of university. Nehru declared that “the universities have much to teach in the modern world and their scope of activities ever enlarges..... It is for a university to realize and lay stress on this essential basis and foundation, those standards of thought and action which make an individual and a nation.”<sup>16</sup> For Nehru a university stands for humanism, for tolerance, for reason, for progress, for the adventure of ideas and for the search for truth. It stands for the onward march of the human race towards even higher objectives.<sup>17</sup> He suggested, ‘the way to pull standards up in universities is to encourage this team work by having Centres of Advanced Study in as many universities as possible. That is to say, each centre will be for a particular subject, and it should function on an all India basis. In regard to scientific and technological subjects, such centres should work in close cooperation with national laboratories and institutes.’<sup>18</sup>

To improve the quality of education Nehru suggested a close coordination between research and teaching. He wanted to encourage research in every field. He remarked “..... It seems to me essential that there should be the closest coordination between research institutes and universities. Also that, we should carry on research work in universities. After all, our major research institutes must be fed from the universities and if the universities dry up, then the research institutes cannot survive for long.”<sup>19</sup>

### Scientific and Technical Education

---

<sup>16</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru’s Address at Allahabad University on 13<sup>th</sup> December, 1947

<sup>17</sup> ibid

<sup>18</sup> Ministry of Education, Government of India, *Circular on University Administration*, 1961

<sup>19</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru’s Letter to Chief Minister, 15<sup>th</sup> April, 1950

An embodiment of modern spirit with faith in reason and belief in science Nehru wanted to bring social change and socio-economic transformation through modern scientific technologies. He had deep faith in science and saw it as the motive force in the regeneration of India's social and economic life. He believed that it was science only that could solve the problem of hunger and poverty, of insanitation and illiteracy, of superstitions and orthodoxy. Consequently, he laid great emphasis upon rapid growth of scientific and technical education in India. Immediately after becoming the prime minister of India he started working out programmes and plans for the development of research in science and technology.. This resulted in the setting up of the five Indian Institutes of Technology at Kharagpur (1950), Bombay (1958), Kanpur (1959), Madras (1960) and Delhi (1961). The All India Council for Technical Education was set up in 1945, to oversee all technical education (diploma, degree and post-graduate) in the country. His government also saw the establishment of many other institutions of higher learning, including the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, the Indian Institutes of Management, ICAR and in 1956, Parliament established the University Grants Commission as a national regulator of standards and a provider of finance.<sup>20</sup> These revolutionary measures in the field of education were led by India's first post-independence Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. Nehru's strategy of state-led industrialization required the universities to produce the technicians who could work in large state-owned enterprises. His government, consequently, established well resourced, nationally regulated, unitary institutions with a focus on specific modern technologies and with access to collaborations with the best foreign universities. His period saw establishment of many regional professional unitary institutions like National Institute of

---

20

Bhalla G.S. (2010). *Economic Philosophy of Jawaharlal Nehru* in Anil Kumar Thakur, Debes Mukhopadhyay's (ed.) "Economic Philosophy of Jawaharlal Nehru" New Delhi: Deep and Deep Publications Pvt. Ltd. p.12

Technology and unitary agricultural universities. The five year plan had the objective of guaranteeing of free and compulsory education to all of India's children. To achieve this goal mass village enrollment programmes were created, thousands of schools were constructed, several adult education centres were established, vocational and training schools for adults were started in rural areas.<sup>21</sup>

If India has become the third largest economy in the world in terms of Purchasing Power Parity, it is because of the multi-purpose projects, the public sector undertakings and institutions of higher learning established by Nehru as well as the systematic planning process initiated by him. If India is today counted amongst the technologically advanced nations of the world, it is because of Nehru's promotion of scientific temper and the chain of scientific research laboratories that he built across the country. It is Nehru who brought us from a backward and dependent economy to the emerging power we are today. It is he who has equipped Indians with the confidence and ability to ensure that our country obtains its rightful and honoured place amongst the leading nations of the world.<sup>22</sup>

Nehru was aware of existence of different cultures and languages. For him preserving and promoting unity among masses was a major challenge. He tried to find a solution to the problem of linguistic heterogeneity of India. On the medium of education, he said Basic Hindustani should be developed as an aid to mass education. Technical, political and commercial words should be standardized wherever possible and foreign language should be drawn where necessary. Nehru clearly emphasized that university education should be imparted in regional language but a foreign language should be compulsory. Provision should be made for the

---

<sup>21</sup> ibid

<sup>22</sup> Speech by the President of India, Shri Pranab Mukherjee at the Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Lecture on Jawaharlal Nehru and the making of Modern India on 13-November-2014, Delhi

teaching of foreign and Indian languages in the secondary schools.<sup>23</sup> Nehru was in fact, not in favor of Regional Language as a media of education as Regional Language and training would encourage separatists' tendencies and narrow national loyalties.<sup>24</sup>

### **Education for Different Sections of Society**

In order to achieve a progressive economy and to establish a social order based on social justice and remove poverty and unemployment it is necessary to impart education to each and every individual of the society, Nehru viewed,. In India, the large sections of scheduled castes, and tribes and backward communities and women have a high level of illiteracy. In Nehru's opinion the purpose of any educational policy should be to eradicate illiteracy and to bring the backward, scheduled castes/tribes and women on par with others. So, Nehru remarked "..... it should be the duty of the state to provide education of all tests to everybody...whatever group or religion one might belong to , education is essential ..."<sup>25</sup>. The backwardness and plight of Indian women, made him realized the importance of education, he further stated "...For my part, I have always been strongly of the opinion that while it may be possible to neglect men's education it is not possible or desirable to neglect women's education. The reasons are obvious. If you educate the women, probably men will be affected there by, and in any event children will be affected. For every educationist knows that the formative years of person's life are the first seven or eight years. We talk about schools and colleges which are no doubt important but a person is more or less made in the first ten years of his or her life. Obviously, in that period, it is the mother who counts most of all. Therefore, the mother who has been well trained in various

<sup>23</sup> Dube, R.P. (1988). *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Study in Ideology and Social Change*. Delhi: Mittal Publications.

<sup>24</sup> Das, Radha Mohan. op.cit,p.294

<sup>25</sup>Jawaharlal Nehru's Speech Proposing the Resolution on Education at the Avadi Session of Congress, January,1955

ways becomes essential to education....”<sup>26</sup> Nehru believed that Education is milestone of women empowerment because it would enable them to responds to the challenges, to confront their traditional role and change their life. He believed both man and woman possess identical intellectual capacities and thus he declared that the content of women’s education should not be different from the content of men’s education. He remarked "Women of India must play an adequate role in the building of the country. Without them the country cannot make rapid progress. The state of progress of the country can be known by the condition of its women because they are the makers of the people of the country”.<sup>27</sup> He emphasized that the advancement of a country depends on its women being educated and trained to raise the young generation on right social values.

Jawaharlal felt the need to educate the rural women for rapid social change; He also felt that education of rural women makes family planning and other rural development schemes successful. To make educational programmes successful, along with English, regional languages must be given primary importance as medium of instruction. Nehru’s views on education shows his rational, progressive, liberal and humanistic attitude.

In the post- Independence period, a major concern of the Government of India and of the States has been to give increasing attention to education as a factor vital to national progress and security. Problems of educational reconstruction were reviewed by several commissions and committees, notably the University Education Commission (1948-49) and the Secondary

---

<sup>26</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru’s Speech at a Seminar on Gaps Between Boy’s and Girl’s Education, New Delhi, January 4, 1964

<sup>27</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru’s Speech at a Convention of Women, at Kalyani, 23 January 1954. From Congress Bulletin, February-March 1954. Swjn/ss/24/pp.361-362

Education Commission (1952-53). Some steps to implement the recommendations of these Commissions were taken; and with the passing of the Resolution on Scientific Policy under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru, the development of science, technology and scientific research received special emphasis.<sup>28</sup>

Nehru considered it the duty of the state to provide for free and compulsory education for its citizens. The state must check that no discrimination is made between students on the basis of caste, creed, religion and status. Education must be made available to all. Under him there was rapid expansion of educational facilities at all levels and creation of academies to promote various art and craft. His greatest interest remained in the spread of applied technology to alleviate poverty and misery and spread of scientific temper and spirit to take his beloved country out of the darkness of superstition. Endowed with indomitable courage and strong convictions and filled with great determination to help his fellow countrymen, he sought to establish a new social order where peace and prosperity would reside permanently.

### References

1. Address at the All India Educational Conference, Baradari, December 27, 1939
2. Speech proposing the resolution on education at the Avadi session of the Congress, January, 1955.
3. Message to the Hindustani Talims Sangh, November 8, 1957
4. Jawaharlal Nehru's Address at Allahabad University, December 13, 1947
5. Jawaharlal Nehru's Speech in the Lok Sabha on the Hindu Marriage Bill, New Delhi 5<sup>th</sup> may 1955

---

<sup>28</sup> Ministry of Education, Government of India (1966) *Report of the Education Commission, 1964-66*. p.ix

6. Jawaharlal Nehru's Speeches, Vol.I, Publication Division, Ministry of Education and Broadcasting, Government of India, New Delhi, 1963
7. Jawaharlal Nehru's Speech at a Seminar on Gaps Between Boy's and Girl's Education, New Delhi, January 4, 1964
8. Jawaharlal Nehru's Speech at a Convention of Women at Kalyani, 23 January 1954. From Congress Bulletin, February-March 1954
9. Jawaharlal Nehru's Speech at Mahila Vidyapith, Allahabad, March 31, 1928
10. Report of The Education Commission, Ministry of Education 1964-66, 1966
11. Dorothy, Norman. (ed.) (1965) *Nehru: The First Sixty Years*. Vol.II. Bombay: Asia Publishing House.
12. Nehru, Jawaharlal. (1969) *Discovery of India*. Bombay: Asia Publishing House.
13. Circular, July 3, 1961
14. Extract from letter to Chief Minister, 15<sup>th</sup> April, 1950
15. Dube, R.P. (1988). *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Study in Ideology and Social Change*. Delhi: Mittal Publications.
16. Kirpal Prem (1990) *Foundations of Education for Free India: Toward a New Quality of Life*, New Delhi, Allied Publisher, Delhi
17. NB Dasgupta, J.L. Raina, H.M Jauhari, B.M. Jauhari's (ed.). "India: Proceedings of the National Seminar on Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Planning Commission and Planned Development in India". New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company
18. Ahuja R.L. (1965). *Nehru: His Philosophy of Life and Education*. Delhi: V. V. Prakashan Publisher.
19. Ghose, Sankar. (1993). *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Biography*. Delhi: Allied Publisher Ltd. P.243
20. Agrawal, S.P, and Agrawal J.C. (ed.). (1989). *Nehru on Social Issues*, New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company.

